

F. M. Alexander



Frederick Matthias Alexander, the Founder of the Alexander Technique, was born in Australia on 20 January 1869.

Alexander became interested in the art of reciting and decided to take it up as a profession concentrating especially on the great speeches from Shakespeare. In trying to satisfy the demands that Shakespearian text put upon him as a performer, Alexander began to have trouble with his throat, which then affected his voice. The medical advice was that he should rest his voice and speak as little as possible between performances. He followed this advice to rest and his voice was fine, but after an hour of performing the symptoms returned. The doctor agreed that it was something Alexander was doing in the way he was using his voice that was causing the trouble, but he could not identify the specific cause.

Alexander decided to use a mirror to give himself feedback and to enable him to see for himself what he was doing while speaking the text. He began to realise that the mirror was informing him of movements he had not been aware of making. He continued the experimental work on himself in front of the mirror and each time he saw he was interfering with his good posture, he would patiently stop.

Alexander realised that first of all the misuse had to be stopped so he could proceed in a new direction - allowing the neck to be free so that the head could go forward and up and the back could lengthen and widen. These directions changed the whole use of the body, leading to improved functioning. Gradually he began to develop an understanding of how his head, neck and back could work harmoniously together and in what ways he was interfering with that optimum functioning. The inflammation of the vocal cords disappeared and his voice became reliable and effective. His general health also improved. By an indirect route Alexander had made a significant scientific discovery.

